

**Town of Mansfield
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Meeting of 16 January 2008
Conference B, Beck Building
MINUTES**

Members present: Robert Dahn, Quentin Kessel, Scott Lehmann, Sherry Roy (alt), John Silander, Frank Trainor. *Members absent:* Peter Drzewiecki, Rachel Rosen. *Others present:* Denise Burchsted & Marianne Piche (Naubesatuck Watershed Council), Joan Stevenson, Jennifer Kaufman (staff).

1. The meeting was **called to order** by Chair Quentin Kessel at 7:34p.

2. Public comment. Denise Burchsted informed the Commission that the Naubesatuck Watershed Council is planning a workshop to assess conservation needs, problems, and opportunities in the watershed, with a focus on water resources, and to develop a coordinated watershed conservation action plan based on this assessment. Individual town Plans of Conservation and Development may not adequately consider impacts on 'downstream' towns, and regulations adopted pursuant to them may not be adequate to achieve Plan goals. The Council hopes to have representatives from each watershed town attend, including Conservation Commission members, town staff, and interested citizens, and would like a commitment from this Commission to send at least one member. The Commission agreed that such a workshop would be valuable and will try to commit at least one member.

3. The **minutes** of the 19 December 07 meeting were approved as written.

4. **Joan Stevenson** may be interested in joining the Commission. She has experience in real estate and has laid out trails for hunting clubs and equestrians in the Hudson River Valley.

5. White Oak Condos community septic system repair. Jennifer Kaufman informed the Commission that the community septic system at the White Oak Condos complex (off Mansfield City Rd.) is failing and that the condominium association is requesting an easement in the adjacent Dunhamtown Forest to install a new system. Apparently soils on the property of the complex are not suitable for a leaching field, and the association lacks funds to install an engineered system (the complex is classed as affordable housing). A 20 December 07 letter from Ms. Kaufman to Charlotte Pyle at USDA NRCS, indicates that "the Town has tentatively agreed to give this association a sanitary sewer easement on approximately 7.6 acres of the Town-owned Dunhamtown Forest to accommodate their septic system repair" and that "as part of this septic repair, approximately 7.6 acres will need to be cleared of trees." The letter goes on to request technical assistance in re-vegetating the area as "early successional habitat" (aka grassland).

In discussion, Commission members expressed dismay at what appears to be an ill-advised *fait accompli*. Dunhamtown Forest was acquired as Town open space,

and what is essentially privatization of a portion of it, without any compensating open-space acquisition, betrays a public trust and would set a very bad precedent. If it's OK for a private landowner to use part of a town forest for a septic system, what objection can there be to permitting other private landowners to clear-cut a piece of town forest to pasture horses or to open up the view? Any proposal to privatize Town-owned open space should be referred to this Commission and the Open Space Advisory Committee for review; it seems to the Commission highly irregular that the Town should have "tentatively agreed" to this scheme without first inviting comment from the Commission, which by statute is responsible for "the development, conservation, supervision and regulation of [the town's] natural resources" (Sec. 7-131a). It is unclear to the Commission what alternatives to the proposal have been considered; an obvious one is Town subsidy of an engineered system on the association's property, should the Town judge (as it apparently has) that preserving affordable housing stock is crucial.

Lehmann agreed to draft a statement on the matter, to be e-mailed to Commission members for review, before submission to the Town Council and PZC.

6. Old business.

a. Administrative Procedures. The updated Administrative Procedures for the Commission have been submitted to the Town Manager for approval.

b. Recognition of Pioneering Commission members. Kessel distributed a list of Conservation Commission members from the 60s, together with a Comprehensive Open Space Plan dated 31 March 1965, observing that many of its goals have been achieved. He and Kaufman will draft a proclamation honoring charter members of the Commission and their close successors for their achievements, which would be read at a future Town Council meeting.

c. Monitoring Town open space and conservation easements. Kaufman reported that many of the Town's open space dedications and conservation easements have yet to be mapped and entered into the Assessor's GIS data base. Money for a part-time surveyor was cut from this year's budget. Kaufman is developing a list of properties/easements that need mapping and monitoring, which she will then prioritize for surveying, GIS mapping, posting, and notifying neighbors about their existence and proper use. However, she has a lot of other responsibilities. Kessel suggested aiming to develop a corps of volunteers, preferably abutters, to keep an eye on these properties.

d. Arthur's Pond. Kaufman circulated a letter from Richard Pellegrine to the PZC, objecting to the common driveways proposed for the Arthur's Pond subdivision on the ground that the Town will eventually be pressured into taking them over as Town roads and spending money for improvements that the developer should have been responsible for.

8. Adjourned at 9:02p.

Scott Lehmann, Secretary
17 January 08
Approved: 20 February 08